



Ricky Lemieux, far left, with Claude, Shawn, Dan and Steph Lemieux in Rock-Tech's new manufacturing plant, a state-of-the-art facility in Sudbury's Walden Industrial Park.

## Rock-Tech sets new standard in ultra-modern plant

### ■ State-of-the-art manufacturing facility designed for maximum productivity, energy efficiency and environmental sustainability

BY NORM TOLLINSKY

Sudbury-based Rock-Tech is setting a new standard for mining equipment manufacturing.

A totally refurbished 31,000-square-foot manufacturing facility the company is moving into this month in Sudbury's Walden Industrial Park has been methodically designed for maximum productivity, energy efficiency and

environmental sustainability.

Prior to moving into its new state-of-the-art home, the manufacturer of SatStat portable fuel/lubricant storage and handling systems, Rhino XD stationary rockbreakers and the Titanium line of utility vehicles had been operating out of three buildings with less than half the space it has now.

Touring advanced manufacturing facilities in Scandinavia convinced Rock-

Tech president Ricky Lemieux that the company had to invest to grow and compete in a global marketplace.

"Mining equipment manufacturers in Northern Ontario used to worry about competing against each another, but in the next five years we're going to see more and more international competition," said Lemieux.

"We realized we had to change as a business if we are going to operate at that level. Business is a lot more sophisticated. Times have changed."

The new facility has three fully enclosed welding cells with dedicated ventilation for dust and noise control, providing welders and workers in the rest of the facility with an optimum working environment.

Lemieux doesn't know of any other

fully enclosed welding cells in Sudbury or anywhere else, but with fabrication, warehousing and welding all happening in one cavernous building, it made sense to isolate the noise and fumes while also optimizing the ventilation and lighting.

A 20 by 40-foot paint and sandblasting booth will use steel shots (tiny pellets) – not sand – to prepare equipment surfaces for painting, and features a full recovery system. The steel shots bombard components and equipment prior to painting to remove scale and promote optimum adhesion. The recovery system with an auger underneath steel grates in the floor collects the steel shots and returns them to an elevated hopper using a bucket system.

In conventional sandblasting, the sand is shoveled out and there's a cost for



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disposal. Steel shots, by contrast, are recyclable, more aggressive and allow for a higher quality exterior finish for mining equipment operated in harsh acidic environments.

The paint booth has a completely independent ventilation system.

#### Cranes

The assembly area of the facility is equipped with two 10-tonne cranes on runways, and there are 10 swing jibs so every work area has its own lifting capacity.

"That alone will increase our production dramatically," said Lemieux. "Sharing of one or two cranes among a workforce isn't very effective because you have people waiting and walking back and forth. Now, everybody has their own lifting device."

For overhead lighting, Rock-Tech went with 230-watt LEDs, "but the output is equivalent to 1,000-watts," said Lemieux. "That reduces our electricity consumption by half and more than doubles the lighting output, resulting in a better working environment and lower operating costs."

Because of the 28-foot roof height, Rock-Tech is using four 18-foot diameter ceiling fans for climate control. The fans recirculate hot air from the heating system in winter and assist in cooling the building during the summer.

The facility is also equipped with a fully enclosed wash and disassembly bay for equipment coming back on flatbeds from customer sites for service and repair.

The bay is accessed via a ramp and allows Rock-Tech to capture and dispose of all the dirt, grease and oil from returning equipment prior to being allowed into the rest of the plant.

The company went to the trouble of polishing all the concrete floors to reduce the dust that porosity in the concrete creates. An industrial-scale cleaning machine is used to keep the floors sparkling.

There's ample office space, a boardroom, luncheon, an outdoor picnic area and separate drys for men and women.

"Currently, we don't have women working in production - only in administration - but we fully envision that with the shortage of skilled workers projected in the next 10 years, we will want to incorporate women into the production workforce," said Lemieux.

Rock-Tech has 22 employees, but with the new plant the plan is to more than double the workforce and quadruple production.

Of Rock-Tech's three product lines, it's the SatStat portable fuel/lubricant storage and handling systems that are hottest.

"We've spent a lot of time and money on reinventing the product - finding ways to improve it and keep costs in line over the last seven or eight years," said Lemieux.

Rock-Tech purchased the patent for the product in 2005 and has more than 400 of them operating in the field.

"In the last year alone, we've sold SatStats in Europe, Africa, Australia and Latin America," said Lemieux. "There's more pressure for mines to control

fuel, oils and grease in underground environments in a safe and cost-effective fashion, and new legislation for handling fuel and lubricants has helped to drive sales in some markets."

The modular storage and handling systems are customized and can be easily moved to a new level in a mine in a day. They allow for spill containment and come equipped with fire suppression systems.

#### Rockbreaker

Rock-Tech started out in 1999 as a distributor for Breaker Technology (BTI), but ended the relationship in 2011 to begin manufacturing its own Rhino XD Series of rockbreakers.

The Rhino stationary rockbreaker is available in three boom sizes and can be fitted with several different hammer configurations depending on the size and hardness of the rock.

Having sold and serviced rockbreakers for so many years, Rock-Tech designed the Rhino with ease of maintenance and servicing in mind. It features improved hose management and easy access to the pedestal as well as an ergonomic chair and air conditioning in a soundproof cabin for enhanced operator comfort.

Rock-Tech's Titanium-branded line of utility vehicles will be the main beneficiary of the new manufacturing plant.

The company didn't have sufficient production capacity in its previous locations and wanted to be ready for the next upcycle in the mining market.

After 30 years in the business, one thing Lemieux has learned is that every

downturn is followed by a period of strong growth.

"Building infrastructure when the market is soft is a good time to do it because it's very time consuming to develop a new plant," said Lemieux. "You certainly don't want to be doing it when times are good because you're already pulling the hair out of your head."

Lemieux doesn't expect to see a turnaround in 2015, but expects the company to settle into its new facility, get comfortable with it and be prepared for 2016.

The Titanium line of utility vehicles includes trucks designed for installing electrical services, pastefill piping and other mine services. There are crane trucks, scissor lift trucks, flatbeds for hauling supplies and equipment, personnel carriers and fuel and lube trucks.

With its new plant, Rock-Tech will be targeting the global mining market, "but we're also looking at growing our business right here in Canada," said Lemieux. "We don't want to forget about Canada. It's still a very lucrative market, and if you pay attention to it, there's business to be had."

Rock-Tech is a Lemieux family business with five partners - two brothers, an uncle and two cousins.

Ricky's father, Rick Lemieux, founder of RDH Mining Equipment, is a former partner.

"We're the next generation of Lemieuxs," said Ricky.

The total investment for Rock-Tech's new manufacturing plant was \$5 million. ■

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